

Public comments received since December 1
Comments received as of December 7, 2016

Dear Chris:

I have attached the Housing Appeals Committee Decision regarding Winn Development's Appeal of the Amherst Zoning Board decision to cut the number of units on 34.8 Acres from the 164 approved by the Select Board to 82 units as "uneconomic." The Appellant had requested 215 units in its Select Board application, however after considerable negotiation the currently existing number of 148 units was approved.

I hope that this decision may act as a prototype for what could be a good outcome for both parties in the Beacon Properties proposal: a compromise. I guess a good compromise happens when neither party is satisfied!

I ask that you please forward this attachment to members of the Zoning Board of Appeals. The issues that had to be addressed are almost identical to those of North Amherst. Thank you so much for your help in behalf of both parties.

Cordially,
Hilda B. Greenbaum

To the Town Manager, the Select Board and the Zoning Board of Appeals.

I appreciate that Counsel has requested a letter be sent to DHCD stating the Town's Safe harbor status and reserving the right to deny or amend the proposal. My burning question, (that was not appropriate and probably never will be), at the opening Hearing was whether W.D.Cowls/Beacon Communities would be willing, in these Safe Harbor conditions, for the project on the 5.3 acre site to be regulated under Amherst local zoning Bylaw OR would be willing to enter a collaborative process, rather than the one sided adversarial one, dictated by 40B.

I believe that North Amherst residents have demonstrated their desire for smart development. They have prevented extensive rezoning of the area that would have allowed the sprawl of student housing to explode north of the Mill River and they have accepting mixed-use development in COM to meet the housing needs of the town. Atkins Farm outlet, in a reused cow barn, was suggested and enthusiastically supported, despite the requirement for access and signs in residential zoning. Other uses for the old barn and new saw mill building have been offered. North Amherst has an abundance of student housing in residential homes, much of it on Cowl's property. Besides nuisance, the fundamental objection to student housing is the necessary transient nature of the tenants and their Campus focus that detracts from the stability of interactive community life.

I believe the "too big, too tall, too dense" concerns from the existing residential neighborhood can be addressed through established local zoning with special permits as needed. This process could allow negotiation of a different sort, one more likely to arrive at an acceptable and more importantly a successful development model for this unique village. Such an endeavor should involve Town Boards, Business, Residents, W.D.Cowls and Beacon Communities in an effort to create a more viable development in the COM zoning that would benefit all stakeholders both now and in the long-term.

Unfortunately the Beacon proposal to be considered raises many basic concerns. The mix of retail/business/services and affordable housing is potentially a beneficial and supportive one as is market-rate housing and retail/business or indeed integrated market rate and affordable housing. However in the Amherst down-town this last combination has been avoided by developers as uneconomical and the business/retail aspect of mixed-use development there has not increased 'vitality' to the streetscape in two recently built apartment blocks. The mixed-use Trolley Barn in N. Amherst has four 4 bedroom-4 bathroom units designed for student occupancy. From these examples It could be said that Mixed Use development is being misused in this town to create large rental business operations.

I am confident in Beacon's experience and expertise in creating and managing a wide variety of affordable housing and welcome them to our N. Amherst Community where we have already welcomed the Survival Center, a preschool family program and a Headstart program.

Unfortunately the housing units at North Square are inappropriate for the family tenants where 3 bedroom units are located on the second or third floor with no direct access to safe outdoor areas from units or from a sizable indoor community space. Children and their car seats/strollers, shopping etc. must traverse parking lots and manage elevators. Furthermore there is no indoor community space in North Amherst where all residents can connect to the larger community. The small library, an obvious resource for this function, does not have toilets or handicapped access. The restaurant, another possible meeting ground, will likely not meet the range of financial situations this diverse community presents.

However, through an inclusive process it might be possible for Beacon to provide and manage up to 50 affordable housing units in mixed-use construction on the proposed site. Market rate senior, (55+) rental housing could be located on the north side of Cows along with the restaurant or other senior related services below.

The southern portion of the 5.3 acre site, presently planned for parking, could accommodate community space in the new sawmill building, connecting to open space and affordable units. It could include leisure services, education, exercise, 'cottage' enterprises, music venue, coffee shop etc. and be made available to the neighborhood. Such activities could be free to the affordable unit tenants while neighborhood participants would pay to cover costs. In this way tenants and long-term residents can connect through mutually beneficial activities.

Perhaps further mixed-use market rate rental units could be constructed along Sunderland Rd with office/ business/service space on the ground floor providing the taxable income the town needs.

This is a suggestion not a plan. An early denial to this 40B proposal could stop this divisive process. The town is already seriously divided by the State funded library renovation, the State funded School reconfiguration and the State funded roundabout in the down-town to solve rush hour traffic delays. It is time for a different way in this changing world.

Amherst has clearly demonstrated its ability to provide affordable housing to the 11.18% through several mechanisms and is clearly invested in continuing that effort. North Amherst will receive two new affordable homes next to the Simple Gifts Community Farm through the citizen initiated and managed Amherst Community Land Trust.

Please allow us now, in these troubled times, to also demonstrate the community's ability to work together for the common good now and into the future. Unfortunately the only avenue to do so is by denying this proposal and TRUSTING all the stakeholders to work hard and fast to meet urgent needs for individuals and the town of Amherst through a different process.

Respectfully Melissa Perot

Dear Select Board Members,

I am writing in objection to the size of the proposed development in North Amherst, and to the fact that the ZBA invoked Safe Harbor.

Amherst does not need 40B/Safe Harbor, and we should stick to the zoning regulations, as written. Amherst residents voted for those regulations in accordance with how they wanted to shape the town, and we have no need to bypass them—especially with 37 waivers.

The proposed development is too big, too dense, and too tall; it would not be in keeping with the small houses in the surrounding neighborhood. There is too much paved land, with too little green space.

I am not against all development, but feel strongly that the zoning regulations are there for a reason. A development that is 3 times the size that the zoning allows is too much and should be downsized!

With all the chaos in the world today, can't we at least decide on our own local way of life without big money interests winning out over the little guy?

Thank you for giving consideration to my letter, and for the work you do.

Sincerely,
Ann Hollingworth

Dear Zoning Board of Appeals,

As a long time resident of North Amherst, with a vested interest in its future, I hope the Zoning Board of Appeals will not grant the number and scope of variances requested for the Beacon Project. I applaud the idea of vitalizing our neighborhood, making more services and affordable housing available. Atkins North is a wonderful addition, which increases our quality of life. However, another dense apartment complex, lacking adequate parking and services, will only diminish our neighborhood. Why not stick to current zoning laws which allow for both housing and commercial development? It seems a dangerous precedent to override well-thought out planning in favor of one project.

Nina Shandler

Dear Ms. Brestrup,

My wife and I decided to retire to Amherst in early 2012. My wife was a townie who I met when attending the University of Massachusetts in the 60's. When we decided to retire in Amherst we started looking for housing opportunities; planning to either purchase a condo or rent an apartment. We were attracted to all that the local colleges have to offer but we did not want to live with students as neighbors. The choices were limited but we did purchase a condo in Sunwood Pines off Pine Street in North Amherst. We have had four great years in Amherst and are happy with our choice to retire in Amherst. After four years we have noticed that the supply of condos and apartments for retirees has not increased. Our real estate taxes are significantly higher than other local towns and there is not been much business growth or increase in our town's tax base.

We are excited about what we believe North Square at The Mill District will do to increase the tax base and offer additional options for people looking for a non-student oriented housing options. We believe the area designated for this development on Cows Road is appropriate and an attractive addition to North Amherst. The retail planned for the development will offer a variety of shopping opportunities without the parking challenges that exist in Amherst town center.

The purpose of this letter is to voice our strong support for this development and hope that the various boards involved in the decision will consider the many positive aspects of this development. Unfortunately, we note that the attendance at hearings for approval of developments typically is populated by those more focused on self interests than what is best for the community at large.

Hoping for a positive outcome by approval of the North Square at the Mill District.

Sincerely,
Sherry and Bill Appleton

Subject: North Square project, let's do this thing!

Atkins North and Bread & Butter...

Two of the best things that have happened to North Amherst in a very long time.

My family and I look forward to continued development activity in "our little part of town".

Over the years, we have lost several of these types of establishments because the community could not sustain them.

By creating new (needed) housing for a range of income levels, this is our opportunity to create an environment that supports small business growth, buying local, and increasing tax revenue for the town.

Let's look at the big picture – together.

Youssef Fadel

Business Development – Your Promotional Consultant, Representing NEPM

To whom it may concern: I hope the Zoning Board of Appeals will exercise its authority for the good of the community and guide Cowls/Beacon to modify their proposal for the mixed use North Square development **so that it fits in a village center** and is a benefit to the North Amherst Community and not a blight to the abutters and the surrounding neighborhood.

As proposed the North Square project is too big. Two large buildings housing hundreds of residents cannot be planted in the middle of a village center, hundreds of additional cars cannot be accommodated on the roads of a village center or fit into the landscape and life of a healthy village center.

If the North Square project were sized **in compliance to what Amherst's Zoning code allows:** 30-40 units, proper height for a village center, proper allowance for parking it would benefit and energize North Amherst. As proposed it will dominate and degrade the surrounding residential areas.

Additionally, serious thought must be given to the traffic challenges at North Amherst intersections and the future of water resources in North Amherst.

Thank you,
Betsy K Mathews

Dear Mr. Toponce,

So far, my examination of this proposal as I understand it raises three main problems.

The first is that people move to and remain in Amherst on the strength of their confidence in what our regulations say they can expect in their future lives. If special interests can thereafter come forward with proposals involving a fistful of waivers and variances which can make that confidence turn to dust and smoke, we owe it to those residents to examine the need of such proposals minutely and cynically. Amherst is a small town, and only so much can be jammed into it without undesirable, and often unforeseen, consequences.

The second is that the proposal to encroach on Atkins North to facilitate the North Square proposal seems likely to have negative consequences for the further growth of this valuable local business. While it may look doable on paper, the effect on the business's customer base of shopping at a construction site, and thereafter in a cityscape, is not likely to be good, particularly if parking availability is diminished.

The third, based on my thirty-plus years in water distribution, is the current drought. Amherst's water resources do not include a large margin of reserve. We will need a few years of normal rainfall to restore what reserve we have, but that amount is not guaranteed, and indeed is not even likely, according to long-term national forecasts. Climate change is real, and so recent that we have no certainty as to what our "normal" weather pattern will be. If the last year proves to be the norm, we are already over capacity. Large-scale residential expansion may be unwise at this time.

To my mind, it would seem better to limit the project to what is allowable under current zoning, perhaps with a view to future expansion if future conditions seem to warrant it.

I hope that you and the board will consider these points in your deliberations, and render decisions that will be in the best interest of the people of Amherst, with particular care for those who already live here. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Philip Mathews

Dear Chris:

I ask that you please forward my essay Mill Valley Estates and the Mill District to members of Zoning Board of Appeals and also to enter this document into the public record. The issues confronting the Zoning Board in both cases are almost identical with the exception that Mill Valley was developing an area **seven** times as large with NO commercial component.

Earlier I sent an email with the Housing Appeals Committee decision on said Mill Valley Estates appeal of the zoning decision attached, noting the subsequent compromise they reached allowing 148 units on 34.8 acres . I ask that you also place that document in the public record for this hearing.

I know that both documents are long but since the time for public comment is so limited I can not get all this information orally into the public record as effectively. I pray that this Board can recognize the severe impact of the size of this development on the abutters, the most dense project in the Town of Amherst abutting either as historic or neighborhood residential district. I request that the Board try to craft a compromise in its decision that balances the needs to the developer with the quiet enjoyment of the abutters.

Please thank the Board for their kind consideration on behalf of the neighbors and abutters of North Square.

Cordially,
Hilda Greenbaum, Ph.D.

Mill Valley Estates and the Mill District: The Importance of Revisiting Local History

You might well ask WHY actions of the Zoning Board of Appeals thirty years ago are important today. The early 1980s, like today, was a time of rapid growth in the number of single-family home subdivisions and apartment/condominium complex approvals by The Planning Board in particular—among others were Amity Place and Salem Place. Construction of yet more multi-family housing at the time became very controversial. It was also a time of such rigorous enforcement of the Zoning Bylaw by the permitting Boards that developers routinely asked for the maximum number of units allowed knowing that it would be cut often drastically. Waivers to any zoning regulations, except under Comprehensive Permits, were unheard of!

Having attended all of many sessions of the Zoning Board of Appeals public hearing for the Comprehensive Permit for Mill Valley Estates off East Hadley Road in South Amherst and reporting to the Observer Corps of the Amherst League of Women Voters, I am struck by the similarities, differences and commonalities between Mill Valley Estates and the proposal for development of the Jones family Mill District in North Amherst. Learning how Local Boards negotiated with the developer of the Mill Valley Estates may help Amherst find that compromise that will create a better project for the Mill District.

When the Department of Housing and Community Development, DHCD hereafter, asks the Town whether “the conceptual project design [for the Mill District] is generally appropriate for the site on which it is located . . .” The simple answer is a resounding NO! The negative consequences of the proposed development in North Amherst on abutting homeowners and businesses in the surrounding neighborhood are the same or worse than South Amherst faced in 1986.

On the heels of a town-wide building moratorium imposed at Spring Town Meeting in 1986 Winn Development Corporation of Boston requested a Chapter 40B Comprehensive Permit for Mill Valley Estates comprising 215 housing units on about 34 acres off East Hadley Road. Town Meeting members had voted 154 to 63 to approve a moratorium because of the risks to “critical resources of the community including the supply and quality of water resources” from so many new housing units coming at one time. The Town stopped issuing building permits immediately while we studied the options on how to proceed. Affordable housing construction was exempt from the ban.

The Select Board had the authority to deny the Winn project outright, given the problems of traffic, drainage, vandalism and the height of the proposed buildings in an already densely populated South Amherst neighborhood of apartment complexes (a total of 580 units on 80 acres equaled about 7.25 units per acre). Instead they opted to cut the number of units from 215 to 164, which Winn could request in its Comprehensive Permit filed on July 30, 1986. After a public hearing that began on August 26, 1986 and ran for more than seven contentious sessions, the Zoning Board of Appeals voted 2 to 1 on October 27, 1986 to approve the Comprehensive Permit Application (#86-69) allowing Mill Valley Estates only 82 units with a limit of 294 bedrooms among 26 other conditions.

Winn Development appealed the ZBA Decision to the Housing Appeals Committee claiming that “the number of conditions rendered the proposal uneconomic, particularly condition #1 which reduced the number of units from 164 to 82 due to “serious problems of health and safety relating to sewage, [storm] drainage and traffic . . . [as] the maximum number of units the site will sustain without exacerbating the health and safety hazards beyond tolerable limits.”[Mill Valley Limited Partnership v. Zoning Board of Appeals of the Town of Amherst, Decision 86-25 April 8, 1988 p.3.]

The Housing Appeals Committee had to decide whether issues of density, traffic safety, drainage and sewage render the proposal “no longer consistent with local needs.” With regard to density: “. . . can the developer build and operate this project . . . and still achieve the ‘limited dividend’ contemplated by the guidelines of the subsidizing agency . . . ?”

The Zoning Board’s real concern, according to the Housing Appeals Committee, was “the impact of increasing the total number of the units by 25% in the apartment complex area . . . [given] the impact on the neighborhood of vandalism, noise levels and the volume of police calls due to poor management of neighboring apartment complexes.” Winn Development was deeply aware (p. 30 of the HAC decision) of the “continuing and deeply felt concerns of the Board”. Yet Winn took the Town’s concerns seriously and offered to reduce the total number of units to the 148 after more discussions with the subsidizing agency. They ultimately built 148 units on the site.

1. Comparing Density.

At the time of Winn's application there were already 580 apartment units on East Hadley Road or 7.25 units/acre. The initial Mill Valley Estates proposal would have added 164 units having 386 bedrooms on the abutting 34.8 Acres with NO commercial component. As now proposed the Mill District has 130 units with about 285 bedrooms on 5.3 Acres, one-seventh the area of the Mill Valley site, a density of 24.5 units/acre in a historic residential neighborhood of one and 2 story homes shown in Table I. The negative impact of such an excessive residential density will be exacerbated by 22,000 square feet of commercial development of the first floor of each residential building in an area that is already struggling to maintain the stability of its residential neighborhoods despite the high number of student rentals.

	Estimated Number	Estimated Square Feet/Unit*	Type
<u>Building A</u>			
1 Bedroom	10	700-750	Rental
2 Bedroom	10	900-1000	Rental
3 Bedroom	4	~1000	Rental
<i>Building A also includes 12,410 gross square feet of retail.</i>			
<u>Building B</u>			
1 Bedroom	15	700-750	Rental
2 Bedroom	17	900-1000	Rental
3 Bedroom	3	~1000	Rental
<i>Building B also contains 5,060 gross square feet of retail.</i>			
<u>Building C</u>			
1 Bedroom	34	700-750	Rental
2 Bedroom	31	900-1000	Rental
3 Bedroom	6	~1000	Rental
<i>Building C also contains 6,555 gross square feet of retail.</i>			
<u>Garage Structure</u>			

*Exact square footage to be determined

Table I: Proposed Rental Units at the Mill District

The 2010 Federal Census reports that the number of owner-occupied housing units in the area north of Strong Street to the Leverett, Hadley and Sunderland boundary lines (Census Tract #8203, defined as North Amherst) is less than 36%. Another study comparing the names of the occupants according to the 2011 Amherst Street List with the ownership of the property as it appears in the Assessor's Records of the area North of Hobart Lane shows as few as 12% of the homes are owner-occupied. A third relevant study of Town Elections and Town Meeting membership over a period of fifty years during the first Charter Commission deliberations shows that renters generally are not invested in Town affairs nor do many even know their neighbors since most are here only on the

short term. Precincts with the largest concentrations of tax-paying home-owners have the highest numbers of voters turning out for elections and the most competitive races for Town Meeting seats.

The 1655 (v. 580 at the Mill Valley site) rental units counted in the North Amherst 2010 Census Tract already subject homeowners to noise at all hours, police presence for mayhem, theft, vandalism, etc. that goes along with poor management on Meadow Street and Montague Road in particular. At The Cecil Group Charettes North Amherst neighbors specifically requested that NO more rental housing be built north of Meadow St. Since most of the Mill District abutters' financial assets are invested in their homes, the intrusion and subsequent instability of yet denser rental housing in North Amherst is a serious hardship they should not be forced to bear.

Note also that recent comprehensive permits for 27 units at Butternut Farm (4.11 acres) and 42 units at Olympia Oaks, a cluster development on about 6 acres of a 14 acre parcel, confirm that permitting Boards thought that about 7 units per acre is a reasonable density for multi-family developments in residential neighborhoods.

The site plan (See Figure 1) in Beacon's application to DHCD includes not only the 5.3 acre site on which they propose to build but also the about 2 acres in large house lots along Montague Road, giving the incorrect impression that there will much more than 7 or 8 % green space on the actual site. The casual observer is led to conclude that the green lawns shown are part of the proposed mixed use subdivision. It is misleading to include these lots in color when other abutting lots that are not part of the project are just outlined on white background. One must look very carefully to find that the blue line outlining the actual site excludes Atkins Market and the houses on Montague Road.

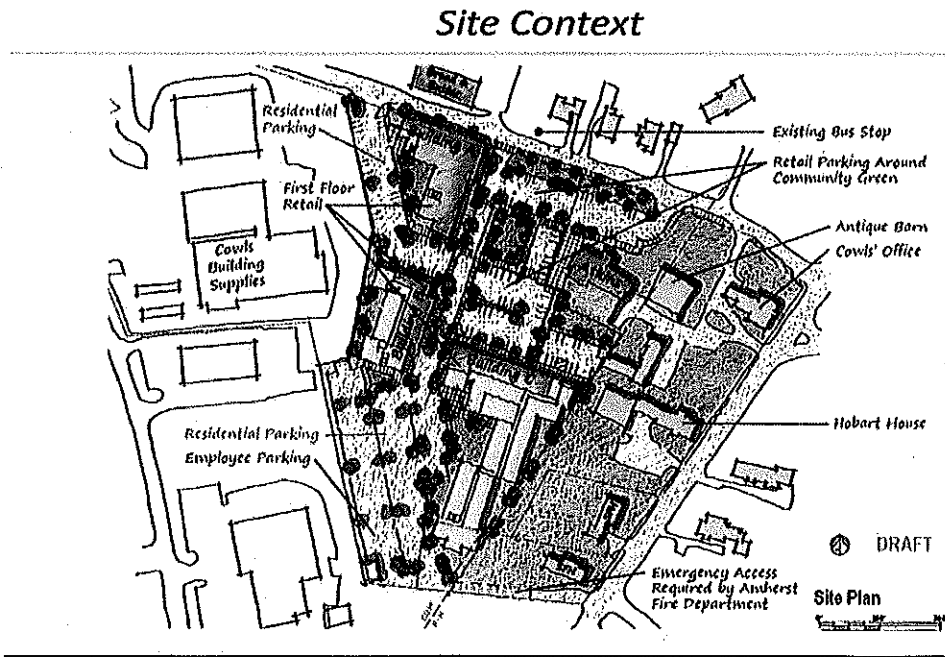


Figure 1: Site Plan Which Shows Green Space That is Outside of the Proposal Site

Figure 2 indicates much more clearly how little open space is left after the buildings and parking lots are constructed. The coverage appears to be more than 90% much more than Beacon claims in their application to DHCD.

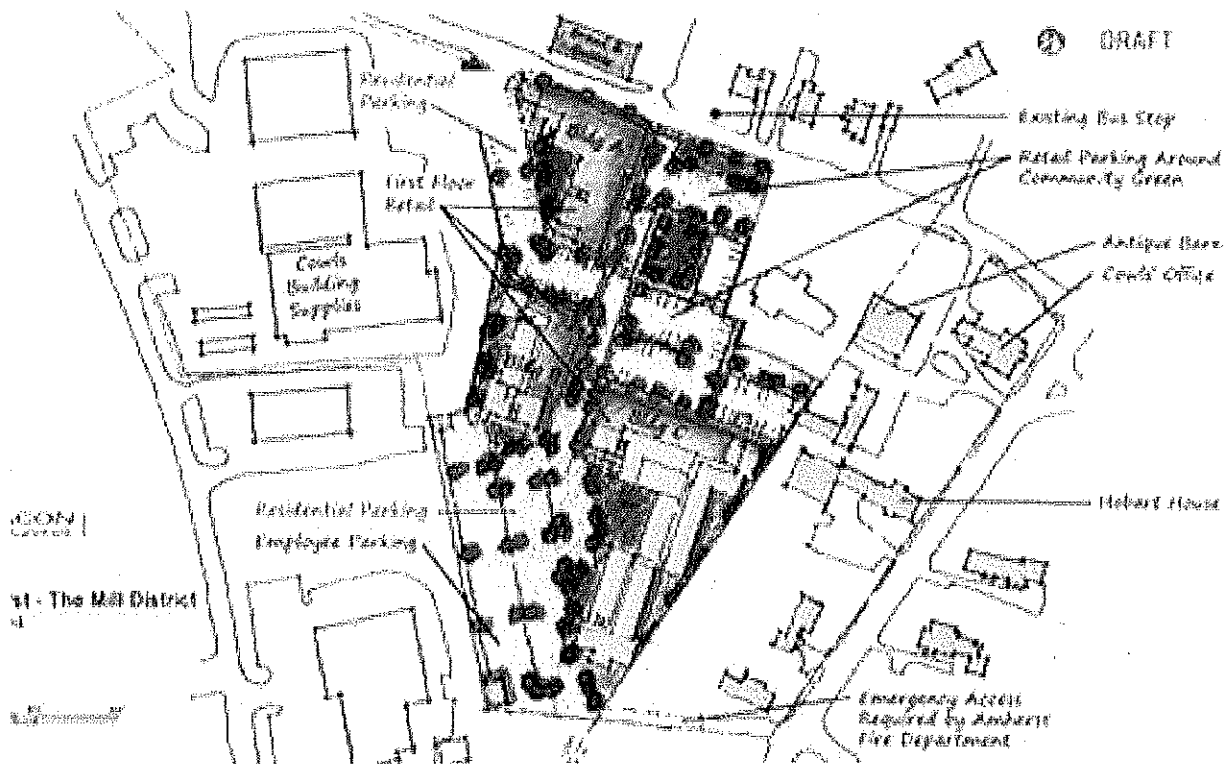


Figure 2: Site plan of the Beacon Communities proposal that shows all land outside the proposal in white.

2. Requested Waivers

The number of waivers from the Regulations of the Amherst Zoning Bylaw requested are excessive, and would be substantially more detrimental to the surrounding neighborhood.

Calculations of the number of residential units allowed by right on the Mill District parcel according to the Dimension Table of our Zoning Bylaw is closer to 30-35, about one-fourth or less than the 130 proposed by Beacon Communities. Coverage of buildings is limited to 35% (80,927 square feet) and with required parking lots no more than 70% total coverage, 161,854 square feet. The site plans presented to DHCD far exceed these limits at what Beacon calculates at 81.4% but appears to be much more in Figure 2.

The developer is asking that limiting total coverage to 70% be waived because the site is non-conforming now. Our bylaw states:

9.21 For the purposes of this section a non-conforming use which has been discontinued for twenty four (24) consecutive months shall not be re-established and any future use shall conform to the regulations of this Bylaw.

The saw mill has not been in use for considerably longer than two years so “grandfathering” of this structure does not apply here. If Beacon is considering the parking lots as the “grandfathered” use rather than the sawmill, the issue is the same. If Beacon insists that grandfathering does apply then under Section 9.22, the Zoning Board must find that the new use is **“not substantially different in character or in its effect on the neighborhood or on property in the vicinity. . . [it] finds that such alteration, enlargement, or reconstruction shall not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing non-conforming use or non-conforming building.”**

I do not see any way in which one could conclude that a 204 bedroom apartment complex with 22,000 square feet of retail space would not be substantially more detrimental than an empty building and unused parking lot. This proposal does not come close to meeting the criteria of Section 9.22 of our zoning bylaw.

The entrance road does not appear adequate to handle the commercial and residential vehicular traffic onto and out of this very constricted site (see Figure 1). In fact a site plan dated 08/30/2016 and distributed to the neighbors shows a road that does not even meet Town standards for a driveway shared by several flag lots never mind a mixed use development with 204 bedrooms. It is not adequate for the traffic it will bear. What happens during winter storms? Can plows get in and out and where will cars go during plowing? Where will plowed snow be stored given so little green space to put it? There seems to be no provision in the site plans for snow storage after winter storms for a parcel covered with parking lots, an issue of concern to abutting businesses.

The developer cites A Village Green as the focal point of the plan. However, the applicant has said that this space that they call a green may be paved. Moreover it is a tiny space lost among the parking lots.

No space is set aside for residents and particularly families with children to play and enjoy a quiet time and space away from vehicular traffic. I note here that Mill Valley Estates, within walking distance to Groff Park, provided a day-care facility, swimming pool with cabana, a children's wading pool, picnic areas, tot lots, an aerobics course, garden plots and tennis courts, while Beacon is proposing only a club room and fitness center for the exclusive use of the residents. Developments of this size should not depend on taxpayers to provide recreational services at neighboring parks..

3) Infrastructure.

We are now experiencing such a serious drought emergency that the Town has imposed a Water Ban. I have seen no published reports indicating with the Pelham and Atkins Reservoirs closed whether the wells of South Amherst can supply enough water the 200-300 new students at UMass each year and the continued development of additional residential units will require.

Secondly, Cows Road was constructed more than 100 years ago to accommodate the turning radii of trolley cars. Thus the turning angles for today's vehicles are inadequate such that a car traveling east from Cows Road faces fast-moving traffic around a blind curve when entering Montague Road. Equally problematic is a Montague Road driver wishing to turn West onto Cows Road who must wait for an East-moving vehicle to exit the Cows intersection. Will Town taxpayers be forced to take land and pay to reconstruct Cows Road to make it safe?

4) Traffic.

Existing problems with the intersection of Meadow Street and North Pleasant Street are well-known. In the afternoon one can wait for the traffic light to change three or four times to traverse the intersection with cars on Meadow Street often backed up onto the Route 116 by-pass. There are currently no reported plans to replace these lights.

To traverse south from Montague Road drivers are faced with north-going traffic from North Pleasant Street which comes from uphill and around a bend while at the same time watching for traffic traveling south from Sunderland Road at a rapid clip unseen behind the growing garden at the North Amherst Library. Plans are underfoot to redesign this dangerous intersection but no word as to whether it can be done in time to accommodate Beacon cars. At the same time North Amherst residents and businesses disagree as to whether the major traffic should be via the commercial district on Sunderland Road or residential district on Montague Road.

5) Financial Feasibility

Beacon Communities presents a Housing Study of the current Amherst rental market. Having followed the rental market here for more than fifty years, I question the ability of local families to afford the market rents of all the comparable newer units on the market. No one knows the actual vacancy rate nor whether the newer units downtown are actually fully occupied. As well the numbers of empty beds at UMass are unknown as there are no reports that students are living in temporary triples or hotels! At the same time there are lots of "apartments available" at UMass Off-Campus Housing, Craig's List for Western Massachusetts, and the websites of some apartment complexes at rents less than half those quoted in the Housing Study.

The employment market is limited essentially to positions at UMass and the four colleges or minimum wage jobs on Route 9 in Hadley. Thus, there are not many potential renters besides students for most of Beacon's market-

rate units as is the case at almost all the other apartment complexes in Amherst where groups of four can share a rent unaffordable to families.

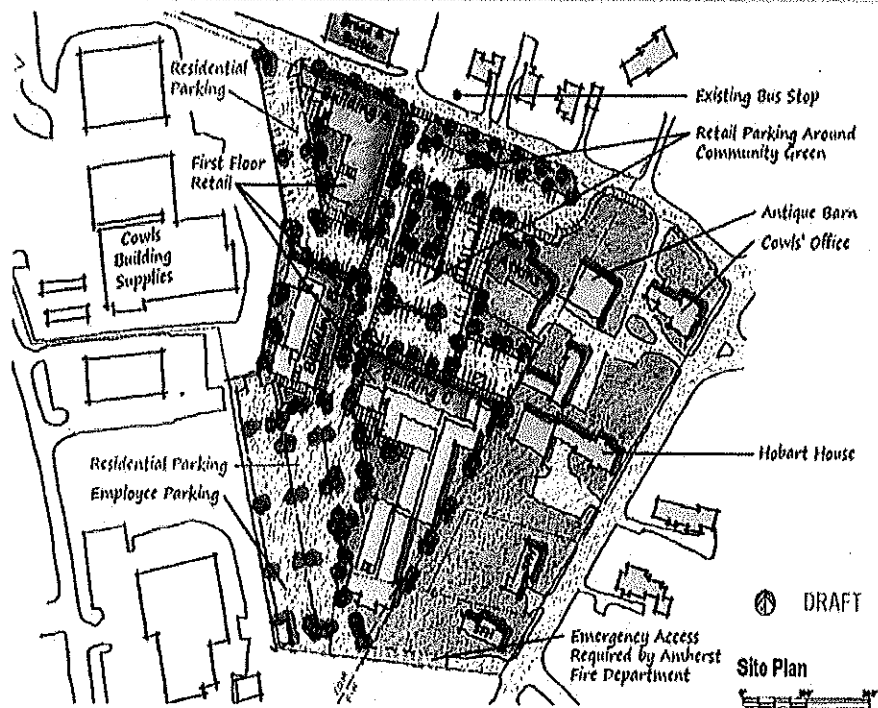
From experiences of abutters in North Amherst it is well-known that the life-styles of many students is 180 degrees out of phase with that of older adults who have to wake early for work and school obligations while students can sleep off their parties of the night before during the day. For this reason alone about ten years ago the Amherst Select Board denied a Comprehensive permit to JPI from Texas to build student housing with 25% affordable units on North Pleasant St. about one-half mile south of the Mill District!

For all these reasons I ask the Department of Housing and Community Development NOT approve the application of Beacon Communities for their Development of the Mill District in its current form. North Amherst neighbors believe that our Zoning Bylaw is a blueprint of how we want our Town to look and feel. It is such a serious set of regulations that a 2/3 vote of Town Meeting is required to amend it. Unfortunately many developers and some Town boards believe that this document merely provides suggestions to be waived whenever a complying with it does not give as much "bang for the buck." Our hope is that a compromise where there is something for the Town, something for the developer and something for the abutters can be found. If not, there are more than 300 others towns in the Commonwealth who have not provided 10% affordable housing units, including our neighbors in Franklin and Hampshire Counties, where the Beacon Development may be more appropriate.

Sincerely,

Hilda G. Greenbaum, Ph.D.
Member of the Amherst Zoning Board of Appeals (2005-2013)
298 Montague Road
Amherst, MA
413-549-6478

Site Context



Letter from Amherst Housing Authority

Amherst Housing Authority

33 Kellogg Avenue, Suite 81
Amherst, MA 01002-2169

Housing Management
(413) 256-0206

Section 8, MRVP, AHVP Programs
(413) 256-8128

TDD Available
FAX (413) 256-8551

6 December 2016

Mr. Mark Parent
Chair, Zoning Board of Appeals
4 Boltwood Walk
Amherst, MA 01002

Dear Chairman Parent and members of the Zoning Board of Appeals,

I am writing on behalf of the Amherst Housing Authority's Board of Commissioners that voted unanimously to support the application of Beacon Communities' proposed development of North Square at the Mill District of North Amherst.

The Board's support is compelled, in particular, by the project's inclusion of 20% of the 130 units affordable to households earning under 50% of AMI, 10% of units restricted to households earning under 30% of AMI, and a commitment to apply for eight project-based Section 8 vouchers. This proposal, with the inclusion of affordable/workforce housing units and vouchers, represents a significant increase in the current dearth of available housing for low to mid income working families and individuals in the Town of Amherst.

We acknowledge that the proposed development under consideration by the ZBA faces some opposition by residents and we certainly respect their right to express an opposing perspective.

And yet, the current lack of desirable, safe and affordable housing in Amherst has reached a critical point that threatens the diversity, opportunity and socio-economic health of our community. In fulfillment of the mission of the Amherst Housing Authority to provide and expand access to such housing, we urge the ZBA to approve this project with due consideration of the following reasons.

1. The Amherst Housing Authority is currently operating at maximum housing capacity and funding to provide affordable housing through our state funded units, federally funded housing and the 406 Section 8 mobile vouchers that we are presently able to fund.
2. Waiting lists for these units and vouchers are at an all-time high with individual program waiting lists in the hundreds and growing and wait periods projected in years, if ever realized. Please see the attached table of our current waiting lists, by program, for detailed data representing the chronic need for local preference affordable housing.

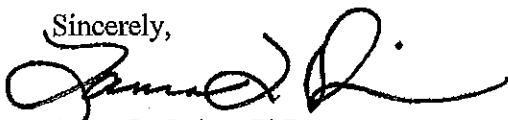
3. The 2014 Housing Production Plan identified a critical need for at least 200 additional units of housing within the financial reach of individuals and families earning up to 50% of AMI.
4. The continuation of Federal funding to maintain, let alone expand, the AHA's Section 8 voucher program is currently at great risk in the newly elected Trump administration and the fate of many Federal housing programs is widely considered at risk by professionals and advocates in the field. Current voucher holders continue to face extreme challenges finding qualified housing in the local housing market as it exists today.
5. Amherst as a community, however, has the opportunity to act locally and affirmatively to address both our chronic shortage of affordable/workforce housing and thus the socio-economic diversity of our town, as well as redress anticipated funding shortfalls on the Federal level that may threaten our ability to sustain current affordable housing programs in the near future.

For these reasons, among others that will likely address the economic development opportunities and Master Plan guidelines, we urge the ZBA to support Beacon Communities' application in all areas necessary to realize the development of North Square at the Mill District.

As a consequence, your support will take those crucial steps necessary to realize what may otherwise be a dream of desirable, safe and affordable housing for low-income, working families and individuals who must struggle to make Amherst their home.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura L. Quinn', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Laura L. Quinn, PhD

Chair, Amherst Housing Authority Board of Commissioners on behalf of the entire Board

Amherst Housing Authority Waiting Lists

Amherst Housing Authority Programs	1 bedroom	2 bedrooms	3 bedrooms	4 Bedrooms	Total
667 State Elderly/Hand	444		0		444
705 State Family Housing		654	360	0	1014
John Nutting Congregate State Housing	7	4	3	12	173
Massachusetts Rental Voucher (MRVP)	151	283	153	0	26
Alternative Housing Voucher (AHVP)	160	10	3	0	587
Valley Main Street	130	144	87	0	361
Pomeroy Lane Cooperative	31	32	24	90	177
Pomeroy Wheel Chair Accessible Units	4	6	0	0	10
Pomeroy Lane Cooperative - Market Rate Units	104	49	23	0	176
Section 8 Project Based Units	24	138	78	0	240
Wheel Chair Accessible Units for all AHA units	17	9	5	31	62
Watson Farms Federal Family Units	127	149	81	402	759

Section 8 Centralized Wait List - cannot be broken down by bedrooms - 800+ applicants with local preference for Amherst